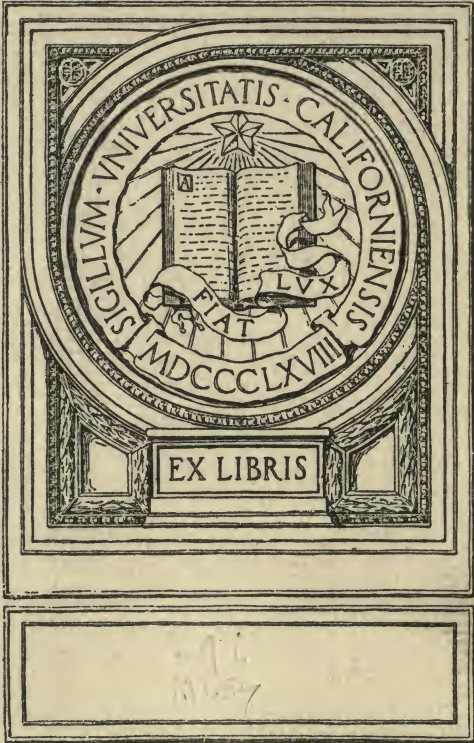


THE MAKING
OF A COUNTRY PARISH
HARLOW S. MILLS



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FROM BEULAH TO BENZONIA

THE MAKING OF A COUNTRY PARISH

A STORY

BY
HARLOW S. MILLS



NEW YORK

Missionary Education Movement of the
United States and Canada

1914

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MISSIONARY EDUCATION MOVEMENT
OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE
MISSIONARY EDUCATION MOVEMENT

TO THE REV. AND MRS. F. A. NOBLE, D.D.,
WHO MADE THE SUMMER OF NINETEEN
HUNDRED AND THIRTEEN MEMORABLE
IN THE LARGER BENZONIA PARISH BY
THEIR PRESENCE, AND BY THEIR
KINDLY AND HELPFUL INTEREST IN ITS
WORK, AND TO WHOM THIS STORY
OWES ITS SUGGESTION AND INSPIRATION,
IT IS MOST GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED.

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FOREWORD

FOR many years lovers of the republic have been warning our people as to the perils of modern city life. In 1800 one person out of thirteen lived in the city; to-day nearly every other citizen lives in a large town, or a great city. The city is the home of wealth, commerce, and finance; the home of music, art, and eloquence. Once each year all the great leaders come for a stay, long or short, to the metropolis. The birds leave the desert to seek the oasis, with its palm trees and springs of water. Young men, for two generations, have been deserting the farm and the village, to make their home in the great city. Many unexpected perils have sprung up from this massing of population. Among these dangers are the tenements, saloon, gambling houses, dens of vice, the tendency to anarchy, incident to

FOREWORD

the contrast between the palaces on the avenues and the rookeries on the Bowery. Insane people, defective children, men and women wrecked through drink and drugs, are some of the incidental results of congested populations. Innumerable addresses have been given upon the perils of the city life, and innumerable pamphlets and books have been published filled with warnings and black with alarm. The inevitable result is that the attention of the people has been focalized upon the manufacturing towns and the large cities.

Now comes the Rev. Harlow S. Mills, with his study of the rural population. With the wisdom made possible by twenty years of first-hand knowledge he sets forth the influence of the country upon the large town and city. He tells us that the country has furnished the leaders for the people. It is in the country that the boy has his opportunity of brooding and reading and reflect-

FOREWORD

ing, while in solitude he develops his own gift and grows great. The Church has learned to depend upon the country for its theological students, as well as for its best students of law and medicine. But of late the country church has suffered grievously through the pull of the city upon its best young men and women. The inevitable result has been that as the city church has waxed the country church has waned in wealth, numbers, and influence. Many things have occurred during the past twenty years that are calculated to stir the note of fear, lest the life and institutions of the republic, rooted in the country, should slowly starve. One of the problems of the hour has been the rejuvenation of the country Sunday-school and the country church.

Leaders of the past generation have struggled often in vain with this problem. Twenty years ago, the Rev. Harlow S.

FOREWORD

Mills, a friend of my boyhood, took a country church in northwestern Michigan, and started in to develop the same community spirit among the people who lived in widely separated school districts that the student finds developed in the wards of a great city. The story of these twenty years is full of fascination to all lovers of their fellow men and of the Christian Church. Mr. Mills has made some important discoveries and established certain mother principles that should be of invaluable service to the one half of our people living in small towns and rural districts. I believe this author and lover of his fellows has grown the good seed that ultimately will sow the continent with bread.

NEWELL DWIGHT HILLIS.

INTRODUCTION

THE rapid growth of our cities and towns during the last quarter of a century has brought us face to face with a serious problem. The religious and social conditions that have arisen give occasion for grave apprehensions, and have been subjects of careful thought. The City Problem has been widely discussed. Much thought and effort have been expended in its solution, and, while progress has been made and the outlook is hopeful, the end is not yet. Within recent years another problem has arisen which is scarcely less serious than that which the city presents, and that is the Country Problem. There are two reasons why this has not attracted special attention until quite lately. First, the city problem has been so serious and so acute that it has occupied the public mind to the exclu-

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INTRODUCTION

sion of conditions in the country. And, in the second place, those conditions have increased in seriousness so rapidly in recent years and their demand for attention and careful consideration has become so insistent and imperious that it can no longer be disregarded. No thoughtful person can now blink the fact that there is a country problem, that it is equal in seriousness to the city problem, and that the two are so intimately related that neither of them can be solved by itself alone. They stand or fall together.

I have no theory to present, nor any philosophy to exploit. I have no patent way of solving either the city or the country problem. I have only a story to tell of some things that have been done that may point the way toward a solution of the country problem. It is the simple account of an experiment in the work of religious and social welfare that promises to be successful.

INTRODUCTION

The parish that is spoken of may be regarded as an experiment station, and this story is only the account of the working out of certain methods. It will be enough if the story shall prove to be some small contribution to the solution of the important and difficult country problem.

One of the greatest difficulties I had in writing this story was with myself. Some of the experiences were so purely personal that I hesitated to speak of them and I shrank from the so frequent use of the personal pronouns. In the first draft of the story I resorted to all manner of circumlocution to avoid their use, but I found it difficult to adopt any consistent form and the result was to weaken the impression. So, acting on the advice of able and judicious critics, I concluded to tell the story in the simplest and most direct way.

H. S. MILLS.

BENZONIA, MICHIGAN,
August 15, 1914.

MAP SHOWING
THE LARGER PARISH
 (WEST HALF OF BENZIE COUNTY,
 MICHIGAN)



KEY TO MAP

1. Benzonia Village, Benzonia Township. Church Organization, Church Building. Morning Service every Sunday. Sunday School, Christian Endeavor Society, Woman's Missionary Society, Weekly Prayer Meeting, Ladies' Aid Society.
2. Beulah Village, Benzonia Township. Chapel. Evening Service every Sunday, Sunday School, Ladies' Aid Society.
3. Eden, Benzonia Township. Church Organization, Schoolhouse (Chapel, 1914). Evening Service every Sunday, Sunday School, Christian Endeavor Society, Weekly Prayer Meeting, Neighborhood Club, Ladies' Social Circle.
4. Champion Hill, Homestead Township. Church Organization, Chapel. Morning Service every Sunday, Christian Endeavor Society.
5. Platt Lake, Benzonia Township. Chapel. Afternoon Service on alternate Sundays. Ladies' Aid Society.
6. North Crystal, Benzonia Township. Private Home (Chapel, 1914). Afternoon Service on alternate Sundays, Sunday School, Ladies' Aid Society.
7. Grace, Gilmore Township. Church Organization, Chapel. Morning Service every Sunday, Sunday School, Neighborhood Club, Ladies' Aid Society.
8. Demerley, Joyfield Township. Schoolhouse. Afternoon Service on alternate Sundays, Sunday School.
9. South Chapel, Benzonia Township. Chapel. Evening Service on alternate Sundays, Sunday School.
10. East Joyfield, Joyfield Township. Chapel. Evening Service on alternate Sundays, Sunday School.
11. Liberty Union, Benzonia Township. Schoolhouse. Afternoon Service on alternate Sundays, Neighborhood Club.
12. South Elberta, Gilmore Township. Schoolhouse. Sunday School.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAP

In order that the term, "The Larger Parish," the name by which the work of this story has come to be familiarly known, may be understood, some description of its geography and topography as represented on the accompanying map, may be necessary.

The Larger Benzonia Parish is situated in Benzie County, Michigan, eight miles from Lake Michigan and at the east end of Crystal Lake, one of the most beautiful small lakes in the state. Benzonia-Beulah, the twin villages which are at the center of the Larger Parish, are on the Ann Arbor Railroad, which extends diagonally through the state from Toledo, Ohio, to Frankfort on Lake Michigan. The Larger Parish includes Benzonia Township and portions of Lake, Homestead, Joyfield, Gilmore, and Crystal Lake Townships. It divides itself into three sub-parishes: the North Parish, with two churches, Champion Hill and Eden, and two out-stations, North Crystal and Platt Lake; the South Parish, with one church, Grace, and five out-stations, South Chapel, Demerley, East Joyfield, Liberty Union, and South Elberta; while between these is the Central Parish, with Benzonia on the hilltop and Beulah in the valley, half a mile distant.

The map represents the western half of Benzie County, and the various churches, chapels, and other out-stations are designated.

I

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE STORY

THE story of New England with the Pilgrims left out could be neither understood nor appreciated. We must know something about those sturdy, conscientious men and women who became exiles and crossed the stormy Atlantic that they might have "freedom to worship God." We must understand something about the barren and the wintry coast that received them, something of their struggles and sufferings, their aims and aspirations, if we would know the history of that civilization that they founded, or get a true conception of the experiment in democracy that they so successfully wrought out.

The story that is about to be told had its Pilgrims. To leave them out would be to

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spoil the story. It cannot be understood without knowing something of their heroic spirit, their sincere devotion, and the manner in which they permanently impressed their ideas and their personality upon the community which they founded and the institutions which they planted. Some account of its historical setting will be necessary in order to make this story of country evangelization complete.

The half century between 1825 and 1875 witnessed the most remarkable educational movement that our country has ever seen. It was the era of college planting. During that period a line of Christian colleges was projected from New York to California, many of which have been developed and stand to-day as monuments to the zeal and foresight of that remarkable generation of nation builders. The value of their work, and its influence for good upon the people and the institutions of the most populous,

HISTORICAL SETTING

the wealthiest, and the most influential section of our country cannot be estimated.

In 1858 a company of people from northern Ohio, who had lighted their torch of religious and educational enthusiasm at the flame of Oberlin, came into the vast wilderness of northern Michigan with the purpose of planting there Christian institutions. They were high-minded, sturdy people, with strong religious convictions. The Pilgrims did not bring to the New England coast a truer motive or a purer purpose. They were willing to put into the enterprise their lives and their fortunes. They stamped the new community that they founded with the impress of their ideals, and that stamp has persisted.

These modern Pilgrims repeated with some modification the experiences of their New England prototypes. After a long and stormy voyage on the Great Lakes they landed in the late autumn on an inhospita-

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ble coast, built them some rough shanties that their descendants would not consider worthy to shelter their cattle, and there they passed a severe winter. They explored the northwestern Michigan woods, and finally, with a strange indifference to the importance of a railway to the development of a town, they lighted upon a level plateau on the top of a high hill, two hundred feet above the placid waters of beautiful Lake Crystal, and eight miles from Lake Michigan, and there they pitched their tents. Like Abraham, their first work after entering the Promised Land was to build an altar to Jehovah, and like him and their New England ancestors, they built it on the highest elevation that they could find. One of the first things they did was to select a site for a church and for a school, and, standing under the tall maples and beeches, with hymn and prayer, to dedicate that high hill-top to the cause of Christian education.

HISTORICAL SETTING

The church that they planted, the first in all the Grand Traverse region, celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its organization in 1910. It has now a membership of about three hundred, and is the center of the religious and social life, not only of the immediate community but also of the territory known as "The Larger Parish," twelve miles long and ten miles wide. It has been the mother of churches, and now stands encircled by a number of younger organizations that are growing strong and sturdy under its cherishing influence.

Benzonia, the village that they founded, never became the populous center that they hoped it would be. There are now but about four hundred people living on the hilltop, and nearly as many more in the village of Beulah, which, at the bottom of the hill nestles around the head of the Lake, half a mile away. The two villages of Benzonia and Beulah form one corporation, and

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contain together about seven hundred inhabitants. The school which they established is still doing business, though not exactly in the way that they anticipated. They thought to repeat the history of Oberlin by planting in the woods of northern Michigan an institution of learning such as the fathers planted in northern Ohio. But the conditions were very dissimilar. Oberlin was in the zone of quick settlement. Cities and towns soon sprang up all about it, and it became in a few years the center of a large population. But the northern Michigan region developed very slowly and it was a long time before there were enough people to maintain a college or to justify its presence. But from the first there was in operation a school of high order, and it performed a splendid service in those early years, doing the educational work for all that region, and supplying teachers for the public schools throughout a wide territory.

HISTORICAL SETTING

It is now conducted as an Academy and is doing an excellent work, sending forth each year large classes of young people well prepared to enter any college or university in the country. The Academy has been maintained very largely by the gifts and sacrifices of the people of the community, and is an important factor of the work that is being wrought out in "The Larger Parish."

The people of this community are unusually homogeneous. There are no Roman Catholics, few foreigners, and no colored people. They are hardworking and industrious, none of them possessing large wealth, and none of them being very poor. All are compelled to toil for their daily bread. There, if anywhere, it is possible to live "the simple life," and in such healthful conditions the community life has developed. Though the presence of the Academy has been a means of culture and the center and inspirations of literary life, it is by no means

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true that all the people in the wide parish are well educated. A few miles from the village primitive and pioneer conditions are found, and there is no lack of genuine missionary ground.

The social life of this community is very satisfactory. There are no classes or cliques. The people mingle together freely on a common basis, and exemplify to an unusual degree the principle of brotherhood. There has never been a saloon in the community, and the people are for the most part steady-going and law-abiding. They are loyal to their home institutions, crowding the church on Sunday and taking a lively interest in all things that pertain to the welfare of the village and the surrounding country. They are dependent upon themselves for literary and musical entertainments—no shows or moving picture combinations ever come that way. But a good lecture course is maintained, and there are frequent musical

HISTORICAL SETTING

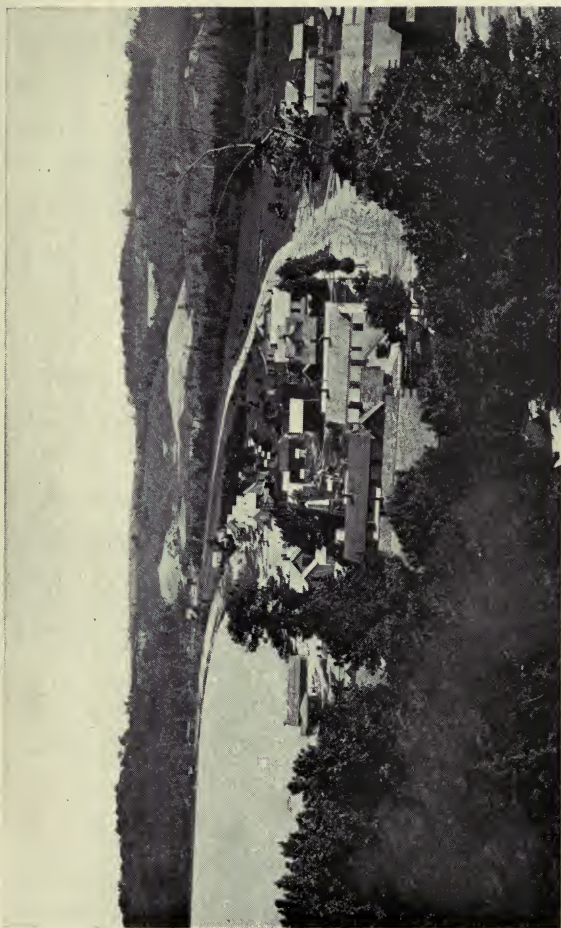
and literary entertainments by the Academy and high school and by the people of the town; so there is no lack of the means of recreation, and that of a high order and of a helpful character.

At the west end of Crystal Lake, eight miles distant, on a beautiful tract of land with frontage on Lake Michigan, as well as on Crystal Lake, are the grounds of the Frankfort Congregational Summer Assembly. The location is superb, and it is rapidly becoming a favorite summer resort, attracting people even from New England and from the Pacific coast. The relation between Benzonia and the summer assembly is very close. It is easily accessible by frequent boats. Every year they have "Benzonia Day," when the Assembly adjourns to the beautiful campus on the hilltop, enjoying a dinner together under the trees and a well-arranged program of speeches and music. The residents of the surround-

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ing country come in crowds to these outdoor festivals and they are eagerly anticipated by all. They afford a fine opportunity for the people of the vicinage to meet in friendly intercourse those who come from distant parts of the country to enjoy the cool breezes and the woods and lakes of the northern Michigan regions, and they are appreciated by all. Sometimes the Assembly is the host, and the people of Benzonia are the guests. During the summer the leading ministers of the country are frequently in the Benzonia pulpit, and so the people, though living quite remote from the great centers, and not given to much travel, have the privilege of hearing the most noted speakers, and thus come in touch with the good things that are being said and done in the wider world.

The Academy and summer Assembly are closely related to the work of the Larger Benzonia Parish. While this work has not been dependent upon them, their presence



CRYSTAL LAKE AND BEULAH FROM BENZONIA

HISTORICAL SETTING

and influence have been a great stimulus and encouragement, and they have added strength and stability to the movement.

Thus briefly is sketched the setting of the story that will be told in the succeeding chapters.

II

SOME CONVICTIONS OUT OF WHICH THE VISION CAME

A CONVICTION is a great thing. It is the egg out of which all great enterprises are hatched. Almost everything that is worth while was once wrapped up in a conviction. Abraham had a conviction that he ought to obey God's leading. He took his journey to the "land that he knew not of," and we have as the result the Hebrew race, and all that has come out of it for the world.

The vision of which I am telling the story was at first only a conviction. There were a few things of which I had become certain. Just how the conviction seized me I hardly know, but I like to think that it came from the same source from which Abraham's conviction came, and that thought has

SOME CONVICTIONS

made me confident in following this guiding gleam.

1. I became convinced that the real object of the Church is to *serve* the people, and that its claim for support should rest upon the same ground upon which every other institution bases its claim for support—that it gives value received. That has not always been the idea of church people. They have considered the Church as a divine institution, and that because of its divine origin and sacred character it can properly demand respect and support. There was a time in the not very distant past when the ministers of the Church, as its representatives, might demand reverence and respect because of the position they occupied. There was much of reverence and regard for “the cloth.” But those days are past. Now the Church is valued only for what it does. If it does nothing, it need no longer look for respectful recognition.

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If it makes no contribution to the community whose value can be seen and appreciated, it cannot expect support or favorable regard. People do not care very much for clerical dignity in these days. They are not asking what place a man occupies, or what kind of clothes he wears, but what he does for the community. Is he rendering valuable service? They are quite ready to pay for service that is of real worth, but for dignity and traditionary sanctity they have slight regard.

There are some who seem to think that the Church makes good by building *itself* up—that if it becomes strong as an institution, if it flourishes in its outward aspects, it justifies its existence. They are well satisfied if it increases in numbers, if it erects splendid and beautiful buildings, if it contributes substantially to the glory of the denomination to which it belongs, whether it really serves the people or not. But it can

SOME CONVICTIONS

never answer the ends of its existence by simply building itself up as an institution. There have been periods in the history of the Church when it was very strong as an organization, but very weak as an element of helpfulness in the lives of the people. Fine buildings and stately ritual and high social standing can never satisfy the great Founder of the Church. Jesus said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." He sent his Church on the same errand. Unless it is doing the thing for which it was sent it has no justification for its existence. It is here to serve, to help the people. In-so-far as it actually does serve it may claim and expect love, recognition, and support—but no further. This became one of my strong convictions.

2. I also became convinced that the Church, if it makes good must serve *all* the people. The impression has sometimes pre-

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vailed that the Church is for good people, for those who are respectable. It has been thought of, and sometimes it has thought of itself, as under obligations to minister to the religious people of the community, or to those who can be induced to become religious. There is a large class of people who are not religiously inclined and who have no affiliation with the Church, and who, perhaps, are not likely to have, for whom it has not been thought to be responsible. In almost every parish, or within reach of it, there are numbers of people who are not touched by the Church, and who are not considered to be material for the Church to work upon. Some are outside of its influence because they live so far away that they cannot easily be reached. Some because of their character and standing in society are considered beyond its pale. What would be the effect if a company of women from the street should come into one of our beautiful

SOME CONVICTIONS

and respectable churches for a few Sunday mornings? How would they be received? Would the ushers show them comfortable seats? Would they be welcome in the pews of the good people who have come together to worship God? And yet, the great Head of the Church came "to seek and to save that which was lost." He did not shun such people or banish them from his presence. He was "a friend of publicans and sinners," and brought down upon himself serious criticism because he did not discriminate more carefully in the matter of his associates. The Church should have the spirit of the Master, and, wherever there is a man, woman, or child, there is one in whom the Church should be interested, and whom it should seek to serve, whatever may be his character, his condition, or his standing socially. It became one of my strong convictions that the Church has a definite mission to every person within the possible

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range of its influence, and out of that conviction came the vision.

3. It also became plain that if the Church would fulfil its mission it must serve *all* the interests of the people. I was brought up with the idea that its mission was largely, if not exclusively, spiritual. Its chief and almost only concern was the soul of the individual man. It was thought that a man has a soul, and that that soul was in peril. His *soul* must be saved—that was the important thing. It was of small consequence that the man himself went to the dogs, if only his soul was saved. The man was forgotten in anxiety for his soul. We were the victims of a false psychology; as if a man and his soul could be separated—as if there could be any such thing as simply saving the soul of a man! We have come to see that a man, though composed of many parts, is a unit. He is not put together mechanically, so that one part may be taken

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and treated and the other parts ignored. He is not built in separate compartments, his soul in one, and his body in another. Christianity is not dealing with souls alone. It is dealing with men, and we are becoming interested in all that makes a man a man. The conviction became strong that the Church should have something to say and something to do with everything that goes to make up the life of the man; that it should make itself felt as an influence in his business, his education, his recreation, his home life, as well as in his so-called religious exercises; that it should be a force with him on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday as well as on Sunday. In other words, the line that has been supposed to separate the sacred from the secular must be obliterated, and every common thing must become sacred. It was seen that everything that has a rightful place in the life of a man should be the concern of the Church, and

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that whatever cannot be brought into harmony with the Church and its principles has no proper place in the real life of a man.

4. The conviction became strong that the village church, if it would fulfil its mission, must be responsible for *country evangelization*. It must reach out into all the surrounding neighborhoods, and touch the people in a vital way for many miles around. In the popular conception the influence of the church has been contracted and narrowed till it does not include half the territory nor half the people embraced in its responsibility. Many ministers are content to tramp around in the narrow confines of their own village, with an occasional excursion into the country, while there are scores of families living a little more remote for whom they are attempting nothing. Some ministers look upon their churches as their field rather than their force—a field to be cultivated rather than a force of work-

SOME CONVICTIONS

ers to be led out into the widestretching fields that lie beyond. This is a serious mistake. Such a limited conception of the extent of its work and such an inadequate idea of its real responsibility and of its best opportunity will certainly condemn a church to comparative uselessness, and in the end to failure. When all the village churches get the vision and see their work in its fullness, the country problem will be solved.

Country evangelization belongs primarily and practically to the village church. The village church is the only one that can really take it up and deal with it in a successful way. It is in the power of the churches in the villages and small towns to change the whole aspect of things in the country, religiously, morally, and socially.

For some years the pastor and church of this story had been trying to do something for the outlying regions, but they had not grasped the idea that all the people for

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many miles around who were not cared for by some other church were in their parish—that for them they were responsible and to them they had a mission. They began to see that they were not doing half the work they might do and ought to do; that there were scores of families, and hundreds of people, to whom the church was nothing, who should be made to feel its force in a stimulating and uplifting way. They began to feel the pressure of that obligation that had rested on them all along, and of which they had been unconscious or unheedful. The voice of God began to sound plainly in their ears, “Go ye forth into these ripe harvest-fields, and gather sheaves for the Master.” The conviction became so strong that they ought to take up the wider work, and the duty grew to be so plain that they wondered that they had not seen it long before.

5. The conviction became strong that, if the village church would fulfil its mis-

SOME CONVICTIONS

sion, it must be a community church. I used to think that the church had simply to do with individuals; that its work was to reach out here and there, to get hold of this one and that one, and that there its work terminated. Society was thought of as a heap of sand, and not as an organism. Man was considered in himself alone, and not in his relations, and so he was misunderstood, for nothing can be truly and fully known except in its relations. But it has become plain that this exclusively individualistic conception was a mistake; that there is such a thing as community life, the life that all the people have in common; that men are bound up together by common interests; that they are members one of another; that "none of us liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself." The conviction became strong that the church should take account of this community life of which the individual is a part; that it should concern

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itself not only for men, but for *man*; that it should serve the whole community, and that nothing should be foreign to the church or ignored by it that in any way concerns the common life of the people.

This conviction did not detract from my estimate of the importance of the spiritual, or of the individual. I still regarded the spiritual part of a man as his most essential part. It was still plain that we have to deal with men as individuals, but I recognized them also in their organic relation to the whole life of the community. Not only were the men's souls to be saved, but the *men* themselves were to be saved. Not only were the *men* to be saved and lifted up to a better life, but the *whole community* was to be saved, and the community life was to be uplifted and placed on a higher plane.

Out of these convictions, which grew more and more positive, came the vision whose fulfilment is the subject of this story.

III

HOW THE VISION CAME

THE genesis of a vision is always interesting, though often obscure. On one day a certain side of life is a blank. There is no outlook, no hint of the coming brightness. On another day that side of life is made all radiant and glorious by a vision, clear and definite, that beckons on to future achievement. Sometimes it comes suddenly, like Peter's vision when he was upon the housetop in Joppa; and sometimes it dawns gradually, and little by little paints itself in beautiful colors upon the sky of one's inner consciousness. As remarked in a previous chapter, a conviction is the egg from which the vision comes; but the egg is only dead and formless matter until it is brooded over and warmed into life. So a

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conviction may be strong and positive, but it may exist for a long time, formless, lifeless, and useless, until it is quickened into vitality by the brooding spirit of a man, and thus becomes an active and inspiring force. So it may be profitable and necessary to the proper understanding of this story to tell how the vision came.

For fifteen years I had been working away in my country parish. They had been happy years of glad, harmonious work. I was satisfied with my job. Though remote from the great centers of population, in a small village, and with people of very modest means, that restless feeling that spoils the peace and mars the work of so many ministers had been absent. My people were of the strong and sturdy sort, faithful and appreciative beyond many, ready to coöperate in carrying out any plans of work that the pastor might propose. They were splendid followers, responding quickly to all my sug-

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gestions. There was a good understanding between myself and the people.

I was called to pass through deep affliction. My home was broken up by a sudden stroke and I was left alone. Into the dark valley of sorrow my people accompanied me as far as they were able to go, and the effect seemed to be to unite us with bonds that were very strong and tender. Every home in all the parish was mine. All the children belonged to me. There was a chair for me at every fireside and a plate at every table.

But as the years went by there came some tempting opportunities to engage in work elsewhere. I was not without my ambitions and aspirations. I wanted to fill out the full measure of my ability and do my best work. And when some opportunities came that made the little country parish seem by comparison rather small and meager, I was not altogether proof against them. To become

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assistant pastor in a famous church in a large city—to take up the work of general missionary for a whole state seemed to promise fields of usefulness so rich and large that they made a strong appeal to the best there was in me, and perhaps also to the worst. I spent some weeks and months in considering these propositions and finally turned them down. I could not bring myself to sever my connection with those to whom I had been so long and so closely related. The personal tie was too strong and I decided to remain with my people.

With the decision came a thorough heart-searching. It marked a turning-point in my spiritual history. I was impressed with the thought that if it was God's will that I should remain in my present work, it must be for a special purpose. Things could not be in the future as they had been in the past. It would be criminal to turn down a larger work for one that was small unless there

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were good and sufficient reasons for doing so. If it was the Lord's will that I should remain in that country parish, there must be some work there that it was worth while for me to do, some work that in a proper degree, at least, would approach in importance the large proposition made by the city and the state. What was the work? Was there anything to be done among those hills and in those rapidly disappearing forests that could fire a man's ambitions and satisfy his high aspirations?

Just here the vision came. At first a whole township was revealed as a possible parish, with every family tributary to the church, and the church performing a valuable ministry for them all. The vision expanded until it took in another township, and parts of three or four more. It became plain that almost half a county was tributary to the church, that five hundred families and twenty-five hundred people were wait-

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ing for its ministry. It dawned upon my mental vision that I was called upon to be the pastor of all these people, for five or six miles in every direction, that the Benzonia church was responsible for them all, that they had a right to look to us for service and help, and that if we failed to give it we should be unfaithful to our Master and recreant to our trust. Then I said: "Here is something worth doing. Here may be wrought out an experiment in country evangelization and rural betterment that may help to arrest the downward trend that has become so alarming in these latter days. It was for this that God has kept me here. If I can make this vision a reality, I need not pine for a larger field. If I can help others to see the vision, and inspire them with enthusiasm to make it real in larger fields than mine, and in many parts of our country, I shall never regret that I stayed by the stuff." The vision came

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as a compensation. It was the reward that God gave for following his leading along those ways where natural inclinations would not have disposed me to go. God wants us to do our best and largest work. He never calls us to a smaller work. If he bids us walk along a humble path and go in an obscure way, we shall find our true life-work there.

The church had for many years been much interested in both home and foreign missions. I preached frequently upon the subject, and kept it constantly before the people. Regular collections were taken for missionary objects, and the Every Member Canvass plan had long been in operation. The response was always general and liberal. In fact, those who were well acquainted with the churches of the state have often said that in proportion to its resources, its gifts were larger than those of any other church. Not only did they give money,

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but they also gave their sons and daughters to carry the gospel to less favored regions. Many of the young women of the church had gone to teach in home mission schools. And there came a beautiful summer Sabbath when a favorite niece, brought up in my home, and an active and useful member of the church, beloved by all, with solemn services in the little church on the hilltop was consecrated to the foreign work and sent forth with the prayers and blessings of all the people to represent them among the awakening millions of China.

As I was sitting in my study one day pondering upon these things, the absurdity of the situation came over me all at once. "Here we are gathering money to send our sons and daughters to the distant parts of the earth, but we are doing absolutely nothing for scores of families that are almost within the sound of our church-bell. We feel some responsibility for the millions of

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people of other lands whom we have never seen, and never shall see, but we have not felt very much responsibility for those who are separated from us by only a few miles. We are anxious to give the gospel to the colored people, the Chinese, and to those of alien races; but we have felt no such anxiety for those of our own race who are not so very far away. There are many families and hundreds of people within five or six miles of our church that are practically without the gospel, as truly as are the Chinese or the South Sea Islanders. We have made no systematic effort to interest them in these things. We have given them no reason to believe that we are drawn out toward them with Christlike motives. Surely there must be something wrong in our calculations." Then I heard the Master say, "These ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone."

And then came the vision of "The Larger

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Parish." I saw the church reaching out its hand and touching tenderly but effectively all the people in the surrounding country. I saw the church feeling some responsibility for every family, and counting them all as within the bounds of its parish. I saw every family in all that wide region as tributary to the church. I saw the church making systematic plans to carry the gospel to all these outlying neighborhoods. I began to think of all those people as my parishioners as truly as were those who lived near the church and were members of it. And so the vision dawned upon me of the Larger Parish. In my own mind I annexed all the surrounding country and began to make plans for the evangelization and helping of all the people who dwelt therein. So under the stimulus of foreign missions the vision came of the work that should be done and could be done nearer home.

And it may be well to add that since the

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work of the Larger Parish began, the contributions to foreign missions have more than doubled. There are those all over this wide territory who knew little and cared less about missions three years ago, but who now are eager to make some contribution to the support of the missionary in China, half of whose salary our Church is pledged to provide.

And so the vision came, from above as all good visions do, but it came while walking in the pathway of duty, in the unfolding of a larger experience. He who follows the dawning light will see the vision.

IV

HOW THE VISION BECAME A REALITY

THE chief value of visions is in their fulfilment. A visionary man is one who sees but does not do. He has revelations of splendid possibilities, but they do not materialize. The sky of his inner consciousness is all painted over with beautiful pictures, but those designs never get on the canvas or into the marble or find their fulfilment in flesh and blood. The most elaborate plans and specifications will not shelter a family nor constitute a home. They must be embodied in brick and stone and timber in order to make them valuable. Only the concreting of ideals can save the vision-gazer from becoming a visionary.

It is always interesting and instructive to trace the process by which a vision is made

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real. Often the pathway to the goal is obscure, difficult, and tedious, but it is worth while to follow it. This chapter will be an endeavor to trace the process by which the vision of the Larger Parish became a reality.

I had a clear apprehension of two things—the work to be done, and the instrument by which it must be accomplished; but just how the instrument was to accomplish the work was not so evident. Here was the church, and here were the people; but how could they be brought together to their mutual advantage? I had been a very busy man for years. My time had been fully occupied and I had not supposed it possible to take more work. How was I to multiply my activities many fold and still be efficient? The church had been active and aggressive. It had been doing large things. In the opinion of some it had been straining itself beyond reasonable limits in carrying

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on its work. How could it quadruple the size of its parish by annexing all the territory within a radius of five miles in every direction, and increase its constituency several times over. Would it not be swamped by its acquisitions? Would it not be overwhelmed by the number and greatness of its obligations and responsibilities? It had not adequately ministered to all the people in its smaller parish. How would it be when its boundaries were so greatly increased?

These and many other doubtful questions presented themselves, and the answers were not at hand. But there were the outlying neighborhoods; without consulting them I had annexed them to my parish. There was the church; without asking its consent, in my own mind I had multiplied its work and increased its burdens many fold. I had a task with the people to make them willing to be annexed; with the church, to lead it to

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accept its heavier burdens and its larger responsibilities; and a still greater task to bring the church and the people into such relations that the work should be accomplished. How did I go about my task?

1. The first thing to be done was to make a survey of the field. I began to think of all the twenty-five hundred people in this Larger Parish as belonging to me. I felt a measure of responsibility for them all. We, as a church and pastor, must do something for them all, and in order to do it, we must know them all. So I started out to visit all the families in this wide territory. Many of them, of course, I knew already. But many that were more remote I had not touched closely, though in my fifteen years' pastorate there were few who had not some acquaintance with me. I tramped around over the whole parish, living with the people, often being absent from my home for two or three days at a time, until there

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was scarcely a home in all that region in which I was a stranger. This was most delightful and rewarding work. There was a welcome for me everywhere. Almost without exception the people seemed pleased to come in touch with the representative of the church. Weary of body, but glad of heart, I laid myself down at night under the shelter of some hospitable farmer's roof after having spent the evening in friendly conversation with him and his family. Such an opportunity to get up close to people is worth a score of sermons.

This visiting tour occupied many weeks—in fact a large part of the autumn months was spent in this way, and in many desirable things more was accomplished in those three months than had been done in the fifteen previous years. I came to know the outside people as I had never known them before. My touch with them was warmer and closer. I came to think of them in a different way.

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My interest in them was more definite and more intelligent. I came to understand the field—to know its extent, its difficulties, and its encouragements—and so I was prepared to grapple with the task God had given me.

The effect upon myself of these tours among the people was most salutary. Aside from the information that I gained, there was an even greater gain in sympathy, in understanding, and in the inspiration and enthusiasm that came into my own soul. I usually made these apostolic tours on foot. I would start out in the morning with my staff in hand with a general route previously marked out. If I saw a man plowing in the field, I would sit down with him on the plow-beam while his horses were resting, and have a good talk about his farm, his home, the matters of interest in the community, and there was almost always a good opportunity to get in a few words about the things of the Kingdom. Then at the dinner

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or the supper hour, when all the family were together, there was a chance to get into the home life, and to be for the time a part of the family circle. I found that when I met the people, not as a minister, but as a man and a friend, there was always a hearty and a glad response, and it was easy to secure a sympathetic hearing for my projects and plans. There was much gained in establishing such close relations with the people. Without such a basis, the work of the larger parish could hardly have been successfully carried on.

2. My task with the church, in bringing it to get my point of view, to see the vision as I saw it, and to coöperate in making it a reality, was not difficult. They were ready for the larger work—at least, they were ready to be made ready. All they needed was light and leading. This I undertook to give. I told them my vision of the Larger Parish. I held it up before them

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continually, preaching it on the Sabbath, and talking about it in the prayer-meeting. I described the situation as it had been revealed to me in my apostolic tramps. From week to week I could see the kindling flame of enthusiasm in the congregation. There was evidently a rising tide of interest in the wider work. The people began to see the reasonableness of it. They began to feel some sense of responsibility for it, some joy and hope as the possibility of doing it began to dawn upon them.

I believe that the rank and file of our churches are more ready to march forth to larger service than most of us have thought. There is really more willingness to take up new tasks and to engage in aggressive enterprises than they have had credit for. The people want something to do. They want a work that is worth while. Many churches are languishing for a job which they may apprehend and accept—for something large

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enough and difficult enough to challenge their powers and kindle their enthusiasm. And when a proposition is made to them that seems sane and sensible, when they can have confidence in their leaders, they are generally ready to fall in line and to march forward with firm and steady tread. That was the case with this particular church, and they have stood behind the work of the Larger Parish from the first in solid phalanx. There have been no kickers, no knockers. In all this work I have had the satisfaction of knowing that the people were with me. They have been helpers all the way and not hinderers.

3. But how should we begin? How can we move out into this Larger Parish and get hold of this greater work? In some way we must be something to all these people. We must find a way by which the church may make itself felt as a force in all these five hundred homes. But how? Well, I

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began to hold services in the schoolhouses around. I could at least hold one meeting a week in these out-stations in addition to my regular duties. That seemed a very small beginning, but it was a beginning. It was the entering wedge to the larger work that followed. On Wednesday nights some of my people would take me to these more distant points, where I was almost invariably greeted by a good and attentive congregation. I had no conveyance of my own, and of this I was glad, for it gave an excuse to call upon my people for transportation, and gave them a chance to have a part in the work; for I considered that the success of the work depended, not so much upon what I did or said, as upon the attitude that the people of the church took toward it. And the presence of the men with me in these services greatly increased the effectiveness of the efforts. I was a preacher and I was simply "on my job." *They* represented

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the church and proclaimed to the people in the outlying regions its attitude toward them. In some of the neighborhoods there were no schoolhouses, and the services were held in private homes. In this simple way the work began to grow.

4. At first I had no definite thought of how the work would develop. I simply started out to do what I could for the people in this wide territory. But it soon became evident that one man would not be able to do all the work that was opening up before me. The need of a helper began to press heavily, but the possibility of securing one had not yet dawned upon me. The General Missionary of the state became interested in the work, and he was the first one to suggest that an Assistant might be secured. This put new hope and courage into my heart. The matter was brought to the attention of the Superintendent of the state, and he consulted with his Advisory Committee.

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He came upon the ground, and after making a thorough investigation, agreed with the General Missionary that a helper was necessary. He thought that the work proposed was legitimate home missionary work, that the best way to evangelize the whole country is for each village church to reach out into the country around as far as possible, until village with village should touch hands over a region that is adequately supplied with gospel privileges.

The result was that a proposition was made by the Superintendent to the church. It was substantially this: that we should take into the Parish Grace Church, a small Congregational organization four miles distant from Benzonia, which had been moribund for a long time, with no regular services for a number of years. The Home Missionary Society would make a grant of one hundred dollars if Grace Church would raise one hundred and fifty dollars. It was

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understood that the Benzonia Church would raise the other two hundred and fifty dollars that should make out the Assistant's salary. This should be the contribution of the Benzonia Church to the Home Missionary Society, but should be returned to the Benzonia field to be spent in the development of the Larger Parish. This proposition was brought before the church at a regular meeting, and by a unanimous vote it was accepted, and so the church in a formal and positive way committed itself to the work of the Larger Parish.

The pastor wishes to make grateful acknowledgment of the part that the state officers of the Congregational Conference have had in developing the Larger Parish. Without their coöperation it could never have been brought to its present stage of development. With clear foresight and generous contributions they have fostered the work, and the success of the experiment is

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largely due to their sympathetic interest, and their wise and helpful efforts. They have regarded it as the demonstration of a method of dealing with the country problem that may, if it proves successful, find wide application throughout the state, and they have been glad to give it their fostering influence and their substantial aid. It is possible that the "Larger Parish Plan" may furnish a most effective method of home missionary activity.

5. But the next thing was to find the man who, for a salary of five hundred dollars, was willing to undertake the work of tramping over three townships, and of becoming the under pastor of twenty-five hundred people. The Larger Parish was still unorganized. It was still a rather indefinite and unrealized vision. It was clear that in some way gospel work must be inaugurated in all that wide territory; but just what form it would take was not yet so clear. The Assist-

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ant must be a man of initiative and executive ability. He must be able to strike out on new lines and to walk in untried paths. There would be plenty of hard work, much need of tact and wisdom, and the absolute demand for consecration. With these aggressive qualities he must also be able to act under the direction of another, and to carry on this work in harmony with the pastor of the church.

This would seem to be a rare combination, and the task of finding a man who would fit into this rather peculiar place seemed very great—especially so, since a mistake or failure at the beginning of the work might put it back indefinitely, or spoil it entirely. But with unexpected promptness the very man was found who most fully met the need. He had finished a high school course, had taught two terms in a country school, had spent some time in the lumber and construction camps of the northern

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Michigan and Wisconsin woods. He had had a wide and a varied experience for one so young in almost everything except Christian work and preaching. In this he was a novice. None of us—not even he himself—knew what he could do. He had but one sermon to start with and all his powers were untried.

I made out a schedule of appointments for him. At first there were seven neighborhoods where he was to hold services, preaching at the Grace Church every Sunday morning, and at the other places as often as he could get around. His regular program on Sunday was three sermons, a tramp of from twelve to twenty miles, with such occasional “lifts” as he might from time to time receive. Several days of each week he spent among the people, sharing their hospitality, and entering into their life. For two and a half years he lived this strenuous life, organizing the work along various lines, reducing

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the chaos to order, getting close to the people, and making a large and warm place for himself and his work through all the wide Parish. He made good, and at the end of that time he was in demand as student pastor in more than one college town, and went to pursue his college course, paying his expenses by giving his services as assistant pastor in a large college church.

As the work developed and the boundaries of the Larger Parish have extended it was found necessary to employ a second Assistant, and three men found more work to do than they could fully cover. The relations between the pastor and his two helpers are very close and happy.

6. Of significant importance are some achievements in denominational comity that have greatly helped the work of the Larger Parish. I had observed that in many parts of our country zeal for the denomination had outrun love for the King-

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dom, and I despaired of doing such a work as ought to be done in the region round about, unless there could be some new alignment of the Christian forces. In many places churches have been multiplied to the great detriment of the cause which they are supposed to represent.

It is true that some portions of our cities are overchurched, but the evil of it is not so much felt because of the unlimited material to work upon. It is in the country and in the small towns and villages that the greatest harm is done. There is many a country neighborhood where one church would thrive and be a great blessing; but two churches spoil the community completely, so far as the interests of the Kingdom are concerned. Oftentimes, too many churches are worse than too few. If there are no churches, there is a chance for some one to come in and start a successful work. But if there are too many, the forces are so

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divided that none of them can do a vigorous work, they all live at "a poor dying rate," an unholy competition is almost unavoidable, and by their fruitless struggle they defeat the very object for which they exist. A minister who had recently gone to a new field replied to the inquiry, how he was getting on: "I am doing very well now. I only have two churches to contend against in my new field. I had three before." The people of the world, looking at the situation of the overchurched community, regard it with contempt, it is so illogical and unreasonable. This evil is recognized by all, and will not much longer be tolerated by those who are sincerely interested in the progress of the Kingdom. In fact, there is a strong movement in these days toward a better state of things.

A fine example of what may be done in the way of denominational comity when a really Christian spirit prevails was shown

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in this field, and it did much to make the work of the Larger Parish possible. In Benzonia there was a small Methodist organization, in addition to the Congregational Church that had existed for thirty years, but it never got a very strong foothold, and finally it was evident to all that it was not needed. Five miles away there was another Methodist church at Champion Hill, that was really within the territory of the Larger Parish. In an adjoining county the Congregationalists had two churches of about the same grade, and surrounded by the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The representatives of the two denominations got together, canvassed the whole matter thoroughly, and were able to come to a unanimous and cordial decision that was satisfactory to both sides. The Methodist Episcopal Church in Benzonia was dropped, and the Champion Hill Church became Congregational.

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And the two Congregational churches in the adjoining county became Methodist, thus leaving a clear field in each county for each denomination, much to the advantage of both. It is understood that no work is to be undertaken by either denomination in the territory thus surrendered.

It was comparatively easy to work the matter through with the officials, but there was some doubt whether the churches themselves could be brought to consent to a change. They were visited by two representatives, one from each denomination, the whole matter was fully explained, showing how much better the work could be cared for under the new arrangement, and, though there was some reluctance on the part of some who were strongly attached to their old church associations, most of the members accepted the situation and cheerfully made the change. After trying it for a year they all seemed well satisfied with

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their new relations, and new life and vigor has come into all the work.

The property interests involved in the exchange were adjusted in a very happy way. All the four churches had houses of worship, and some of them had parsonages. A commission was appointed to appraise the property, consisting of two members each from the Congregational and Methodist Churches of Traverse City. They went together, examined all the holdings and brought in a report. The two Methodist men thought the Congregationalists ought to give two hundred and fifty dollars to boot. The two Congregational men thought the Methodists ought to give two hundred and fifty dollars. So they agreed to trade even, and all parties were satisfied. This gives the Congregationalists undisputed jurisdiction throughout all the territory of the Larger Parish. In all that region they are without competition, with

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the exception of a small Disciple church in one corner of the field, which divides up the work of one neighborhood to its great disadvantage. There are a good many Methodist people living within the bounds of the Larger Parish, but most of them are allying themselves with the church that is doing the work, and the same is true of the Congregationalists. They are now well satisfied with the arrangement.

So we may trace the steps by which the vision became reality. The work has been a gradual development from the very first, one step leading to another, often with no more light than was sufficient for the single step.

V

THE METHODS OF THE LARGER PARISH

PRACTICAL methods that can be successfully worked constitute the great need in any enterprise. The real measure of the value of any plan or scheme is found in what it accomplishes. It may look well—the vision may be enticing—but will it really do the business? If, after a fair trial, achievements sufficient to justify the effort do not appear, the scheme, the method, the vision, however promising it may have seemed, must be discarded. A mill that does not turn out lumber soon goes upon the junk heap. So a plan that does not bring results will soon be relegated to the limbo of unpractical and useless things. Of course it requires time fairly to test a plan, an enterprise, or a method. An

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important experiment cannot be finished in a day. But after three years it is time to look for some proofs of success. What have we to show after working three years that will justify the methods that have been used? What methods have been employed? How have they worked, and what have they accomplished?

Nothing has been finished. The work is a growth, and is still in the process of development. We are all the while finding something more to do for the people, and larger possibilities of service are opening up before us continually. But it may be said to have passed beyond the experimental stage. Nobody looks upon it any longer as simply an experiment. It is a practical plan in successful operation. The church has come to have a well-defined policy. The people have accepted the idea of the Larger Parish and are coöperating heartily in carrying it out. The work has been organized in re-

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spect to various community human interests, and is moving on with a fair degree of satisfaction. We are now in a position to deliver *some* goods—at least enough to prove that we are working a practical scheme; enough, as we believe, to be a sure prophecy of greater results in the future.

I. RELIGIOUS AND EVANGELISTIC PROGRESS

First, I will speak of some methods used and some things done that show religious advance. This must be the crucial test of any church work. It must be work for the kingdom of God. It must bring people into harmony with God and his truth, it must line them up on the side of Jesus Christ, or it cannot be said to be successful, however many other desirable things it may accomplish. It is not easy to tabulate spiritual results. Any showing that can be made on paper may be more than the truth or less than the truth. Reports of organiza-

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tions and methods and activities may be misleading. The most that they can do is to approximate the truth. And yet, that is the only way we have of reporting spiritual results. The results of religious work must appear in the lives of the people, in the Christian sentiment of the community, in the upward trend of all things that make for righteousness and for the establishment and prevalence of the kingdom of God. These things cannot be definitely reported, but some things can be mentioned that will indicate progress.

The work has been fairly well organized throughout the whole parish and is moving steadily forward in definite directions. There are now twelve points where regular Sunday services are held in this territory, which comprises one whole township and portions of five others. These services are held in one church, six chapels, four schoolhouses, and one private home. Other

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points are asking for services, but with our present force no more work can be undertaken. These preaching points are so arranged that no family, with the exception of a few who live in one remote corner of the parish, need go more than a mile and a half to find a place of worship. The aggregate attendance on these services will average not far from six hundred, in a population of twenty-five hundred—about one fourth of the inhabitants of the parish being present with some degree of regularity.

There are four organized churches in the parish, at Benzonia, Grace, Champion Hill, and Eden. Their combined membership is about four hundred. When the church was organized at Eden last year, thirty members were dismissed from the Benzonia Church to enter the new organization. They had long been connected with the Benzonia Church, and it was with

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some reluctance that they severed their connection with the mother church. They wished in some way to retain a relation to the church that had for them so many tender associations. So they decided that of their five trustees, two should be chosen from the old central church. The two churches at Grace and Champion Hill are likely to follow suite. In that case, we shall have a group of four churches, organically related, standing together to do the work of the Larger Parish. The trustees of the local church will attend to all ordinary matters, but will feel free to call in the other two trustees to consult with them in things of special importance. The trustees from the central church will, of course, feel a special responsibility for the welfare of the branch church with which they are connected. This arrangement will unify all the religious activities of the parish, and bind them up together in one organic rela-

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tion. And the churches that enter into the arrangement will surrender none of their independence as Congregational churches. They will still be absolutely free to control their own affairs. It is understood that the office of the trustees from the central church is largely advisory. While this is something new in Congregationalism, it promises to work well, and if it does, it will be its own sufficient justification.

Ten Sunday-schools are maintained within the parish, with a combined membership of about six hundred. Most of the schools are self-sustaining, and are well able to carry on their own work without outside help, but some are conducted by helpers who go out from the central church. The schools at Benzonia and Eden are well graded, and are conducted according to the up-to-date methods. The Benzonia school has an average attendance of more than one hundred and fifty, and the music is led by

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a large orchestra. The Eden school has graduated two classes in teacher-training, and the third one, with seventeen members, is now at work. The Home Department is maintained, and much is made of the Cradle Roll. Conventions in connection with the schools in the two adjoining townships are held once a quarter, and they are doing much to unite the Sunday-school interests in this region and to promote team work.

The clerical force that carries on the work throughout the parish is composed of the pastor and his two assistants. The pastor preaches twice on Sunday, in the church at Benzonia in the morning, and in the chapel at Beulah, half a mile distant, in the evening. Each of the assistants preaches three times, traveling from twelve to twenty miles in reaching their appointments. The Larger Parish naturally divides itself into three parts: the North Parish, with two

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churches, and two out-stations, served by Mr. Caldwell; the South Parish, with one church and five out-stations, served by Mr. Huck; and Benzonia and Beulah in between, served by the pastor, who also has the oversight of the whole field.

The three pastors usually get together on Mondays, talk over the work, compare sermons and discuss them, and spend part of the day in the most delightful fellowship. They make frequent exchanges, taking each other's work for a Sunday, thus giving the people a change, and themselves some variety of experience, and promoting acquaintance and fellowship throughout the whole parish. This is a most profitable combination. The older pastor helps the younger men with his wider experience, and "the boys" put new life and fresh spirits into the heart of the "older man." Two men, if they are congenial and can work harmoniously together, are worth more

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than double the value of one man. And three men, joining their forces, increase their efficiency in geometrical ratio. Many a minister who works away in isolation and discouragement would have new heart and courage for his difficult task, if he might be closely associated with one or two congenial and kindred spirits. That is one of the advantages of the Larger Parish Plan—it makes such association and combination possible.

In the autumn of 1912 the pastor was impressed with the thought that the special emphasis for that year should be placed on the evangelistic phase of the work. Thirteen weeks in all were spent in holding special services at six different points. Two ministers from neighboring parishes assisted. Much use was made of the stereopticon. In the out-stations the preaching was done by the pastors in turn, and there was thorough personal work.

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Good results came from these meetings. A large number decided to begin the Christian life. About sixty new members were received into the Benzonia church, and as many more into the other churches in the parish. Not all of those received were converted in the special meetings. Thirty of those who came into the Eden church were dismissed from the Benzonia church, and some others came by letter. One of the results of these special meetings was the organization of the Eden church. The hearts of the people were drawn together, the religious interest was quickened throughout the whole territory, and the idea of the Larger Parish came to be more generally accepted.

Eden is a country neighborhood three miles north of Benzonia. The people are thrifty farmers and fruit raisers, and about a dozen families living there had for many years been connected with the Benzonia

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church, and were among its most faithful supporters. For twenty-five or thirty years a Sunday-school had been maintained in that community—one of the best country schools in the state. A young people's society and a weekly prayer-meeting had also been kept up for a long time. The special meetings were held in the school-house in the month of February, amid the stormiest weather of the winter. But nothing could keep the people away. There was a deep interest, and a number of positive conversions. It was thought best to organize a church. Thirty members were dismissed from the Benzonia church to enter into the new organization and it started with fifty charter members. Practically all the religious elements of the community came together in the new church and it was launched with much rejoicing and enthusiasm. Under the efficient leadership of the assistant pastor, it has gone

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steadily forward, and though the meetings held are in a schoolhouse that is most inconvenient and inadequate for their needs, they are as dignified and churchly as many that are conducted in more appropriate surroundings. There is a full service of readings, responses, well-prepared music by a faithful choir, and the presence and power of God's Spirit is often strikingly manifest in the services. The recognition services of the Eden church were most impressive. The schoolhouse was crowded to its utmost capacity. Nearly fifty stood up together and entered into covenant relations, a large number receiving the rite of baptism. The communion service conducted by the pastor was especially solemn and tender, and those present will long remember the influences of that hour.

In a number of cases the services have been held in schoolhouses that are inconvenient and inadequate, and in one instance

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the only place where the meetings could be held was a private home. A movement is on foot to supply these places with chapels that will meet the needs of the community. Last summer a neat chapel was built at Platt Lake. There is no schoolhouse in that community. The children are taken in a bus to the Honor school, and there was no settled meeting-place for more than two years, the services being held in turn from house to house. Platt Lake is somewhat of a summer resort, and the visiting people gave substantial help in the construction of the chapel. It is a convenient little building, well furnished, with organ and stove contributed by the Benzonia church. There being no ecclesiastical organization in the place, the title of the building is vested in the Michigan State Conference, with the understanding that when a church is formed it shall be deeded back. Since the erection of the chapel a fresh impetus has been given



THE PLATT LAKE CHAPEL
A Typical Preaching Place in the Larger Parish

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to the work in Platt Lake. At this point no regular religious services had ever been held until the movement of the Larger Parish began.

The Eden church planned to erect a new building in the summer of 1914, in the form of a comfortable chapel with basement rooms for social purposes. Early in the spring of 1913 the farmers set apart a certain portion of their land, the products of which should be given for a chapel fund. About fifteen farmers entered into this arrangement, the children also setting hens and cultivating garden patches for the same purpose. On Thanksgiving night of that year they had a special service at the schoolhouse to bring in the returns. A neat model of a church was made for the occasion and placed on the desk, and after an interesting program the people filed past the desk and dropped into the model church the proceeds of their summer's toil. It was

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found to contain more than two hundred and fifty dollars—a good starter for the new building. Though the resources of the community are limited, they are all working together with such industry and enthusiasm that it is probable that they will soon have a pleasant and convenient church home.

At North Crystal where there is a flourishing Sunday-school and where the services are held in a private home, the people are working hard to build a little chapel. Here too the resorters, who have their cottages along the shore of Crystal Lake, are very helpful. In the summer the meetings are held under the trees, and large crowds come together to hear the gospel and to join in the songs. The Ladies' Aid Society is working hard and considerable progress has been made in collecting a chapel fund. Poverty of resources can hardly prevent the accomplishment of such

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an enterprise when all the people unite in the effort so heartily and with such a willingness to make sacrifices for the desired end. The church at Benzonia has also been building an addition to its house of worship, adding one hundred sittings and numerous rooms for the accommodation of the Sunday-school and social work. One would have been considered rash indeed who should have prophesied beforehand that in two years in this community of limited resources so large a sum could be raised for the purpose of providing accommodations for the worship of God and for community and social work.

If the amount of money that people are willing to give for religious purposes is an index of their interest in the Kingdom, one must conclude that there has been a very significant revival in that respect throughout the Larger Parish. More means for carrying on the work are now in sight than

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any one would have supposed it possible to raise three years ago.

The salaries paid the pastor and his two assistants are two and a half times as much as was paid to the pastor alone before the wider work was undertaken. This, however, is made possible only through the help of the Home Missionary Society. The contributions for home and foreign missions have more than doubled during this period, and the number of contributors has increased more than twofold. If there was any hesitation about undertaking the wider work on account of the increased financial obligation involved, experience has shown that it was unnecessary. More than twice as much money is raised on the whole field now than was the case before the wider work began, and it comes with just as little effort. Nobody now objects to the work on financial grounds. It has paid for itself in every way.

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This experience leads me to believe that on almost every field there are resources sufficient for carrying on all the work that needs to be done there, if only they can be reached, and I am also convinced that an active, aggressive program will be much more successful in developing the resources than a timid and conservative effort can ever be.

In order to promote unity and fellowship throughout the whole parish, occasional meetings designed to bring all the people together are held with very good results. Two or three times during the year all the services in the various points are omitted and the people come together on the beautiful campus on the Benzonia hilltop and spend the day in worship and in social intercourse. The services are held in the shade of the great beech and maple trees that crown the summit of the hill. There is a large choir and orchestra to lead the music,

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some noted speaker from abroad preaches the sermon, and the congregation of four or five hundred is as devout and attentive as can be found in any church building. At the close of the service they assemble in groups to eat the lunch which they have brought, the coffee being furnished by the Benzonia people, and they spend two hours in delightful social intercourse, many old friends and neighbors meeting there who might not otherwise see each other for years. In the afternoon a platform meeting is held with a number of speakers, and as the sun is sinking low in the west the people disperse and go quietly to their homes, with a larger outlook, a quickened community consciousness, and a fuller appreciation of the work of the Larger Parish. Last year we had on one Sabbath "Larger Parish Sunday School Rally." Posters announcing the meeting had been previously circulated. All the ten schools of the par-

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ish assembled, holding in the morning such a service as I have described, having dinner together, and in the afternoon occurred the Children's Day services, with exercises by the various schools and an address by John E. Gunckel, the famous Toledo newsboy man. These Larger Parish rallies have proved to be a valuable feature of the work and are anticipated with pleasure by all the people.

I wonder if any pastor ever felt entirely satisfied with the results of his work? I certainly do not. I have fallen far short of my ideal. In looking back I see failures enough to keep me humble and mistake enough to make me cautious. The numbers that have not been reached are so great that the thought of them mingles much of sadness with the gladness for those who have come into the Kingdom. I am thankful for the results that can be reported, and I consider them sufficient to justify the method

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of the Larger Parish. If the method had been more efficiently worked there would have been more to show. My hope is that some one may make a better use of it and that such results may be evident that the Larger Parish method will come into general operation, and that it may play a large part in the spiritual and social rehabilitation of the rural regions.

II. COMMUNITY UPLIFT AND SOCIAL BETTERMENT

One of the convictions out of which the vision came that led to the work of the Larger Parish was that the Church should minister to the *whole man*; that nothing that goes to make a man a full-rounded man, or that has a legitimate place in his life should be ignored by the Church; that it should have something to say and something to do with his social nature as well as his religious nature; that it should con-

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cern itself with the affairs of the community and be an element of uplifting power in the community life. Following this conviction, it was quite natural that, when the work of the Larger Parish was undertaken, considerable attention should be paid to that part of the life of the people that is often thought to lie outside of the distinctive realm of religion. The effort has been made to help the people in a social way and to make their recreations healthful and wholesome, to stimulate and guide them in their intellectual life, and by these broader aims to minister to all their needs. It may be profitable to show how the methods used in the work of the Larger Parish have contributed to these ends.

Recognizing the tendency of country life to isolation and extreme individualism and the danger of its becoming barren and monotonous, we have thought it important to provide for social and literary functions,

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and for wholesome recreation and healthful pleasures. This was thought desirable, not only for the young people, but for all the people, and we have sought to bring together in these activities the old and the young, and the children as well. It has been our effort to make all our out-stations, where services are held, social centers, and to encourage frequent meetings of the people where they might mingle together in a free and friendly manner. The people have responded to these efforts and have appreciated very much the opportunities that have been afforded them in this direction.

1. Neighborhood Clubs have been formed in some of the out-stations whose function it is to provide for these social necessities. The name, "Neighborhood Club" quite well defines their object. They are to serve as social centers. There is a simple constitution and by-laws, and the usual officers. But the work is carried on

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under the direction of three committees in three departments. First, there is a Social Committee, whose business it is to arrange for picnics, parties, sociables, excursions, etc. Then there is a Literary Committee that provides for literary entertainments, lectures, debates, and the like. After that comes the Team Work Committee, which leads out in any movement in which the people need to coöperate, such as helping an unfortunate neighbor to harvest his crops, planting trees by the roadside, plowing out the roads in winter, or mending a bad place in the highway. Often many kindly deeds are omitted, and many desirable things for a community are left undone, not because the people are selfish, or wanting in public spirit, but for lack of leading. There is no one to lead out in such things, and so they are neglected.

Not long ago one of the neighborhood clubs spent the day in helping to raise a

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barn, having a dinner together and enjoying a jolly social time. One of the clubs offered a prize for rat-killing, getting out some posters that were a curiosity. From time to time various matters of local interest are taken up and discussed by the club, and considerable talent in debate has been developed in unexpected places. Occasionally the various neighborhood clubs get together for a day of sports and recreation. They have in the forenoon games and contests, then a picnic dinner, followed by a program of music and addresses. These gatherings promote neighborliness and afford the farmers and their wives and children a little break in the monotony of their toilsome lives.

The first winter a lecture course was organized, consisting of five or six numbers, mostly by home talent. All these lectures were given before the various clubs. The pastor gave an account of his travels in the

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Holy Land. The principal of the Academy talked about "The Farm and the School." A doctor from a neighboring town spoke about "Farm Sanitation," and an expert horticulturist about "Better Orchards." A layman spoke about "Some Legal Principles That Should be Generally Known." Much interest was taken in these lectures, and the people turned out well to hear them. The next winter the clubs arranged their own programs and carried on a lively and interesting campaign. One of the clubs had a series of Special Topic nights. One night was devoted to "The Pilgrims," with a varied and interesting program. Another to "Abraham Lincoln," another to "Michigan," with a program full of information, historical, statistical, and otherwise, about the state of which the community was a part. One of the clubs organized and maintained an Old Fashioned Singing School under an instructor from

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the village, that was a fair success. These neighborhood clubs have proved to be very popular and very valuable, and it would seem that they are well adapted to almost any country community, taking the place of the old lyceums and literary societies of a former generation that did so much to sharpen the wits, inform the minds, and increase the friendliness of those who went before us.

2. In some of the neighborhoods where it has not yet been thought best to organize clubs, some attention has been paid to this side of life and some provision made for social diversions. During Thanksgiving week, festivals were held in three different places that were very successful and profitable. The description of one of them will be typical. Three communities, East Joyfield, Demerley, and the South Chapel, united in holding a festival in the Joyfield Town Hall on Thanksgiving Day. Thor-

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ough preparations had been made. Various committees were appointed, the teachers in the four school districts included in that territory trained the children, a program of games and sports and contests was arranged, and all the people took much interest in getting ready for the event. At three o'clock a religious service was held in the hall and the pastor preached a Thanksgiving sermon to a large and attentive congregation.

While the ladies were preparing the supper, the program of sports, a part of which had been previously given in a large barn near by, was finished on the lawn. Various races were run and stunts of different kinds were performed, including a tug of war and wrestling matches, that took up the time till the call to supper came. Two long tables extending the whole length of the hall were filled twice, not less than one hundred and fifty sitting down to a sumptuous feast.

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When all had satisfied the wants of the "inner man," there were supplies enough left to feed another crowd almost as great, so lavish are the country folk in their hospitality.

As soon as the tables could be cleared away and the people could get seated the evening's entertainment began. The hall was crowded to its utmost capacity, the people were jammed in like sardines in a box, and some could not find entrance, but the utmost good nature prevailed, and they sat, not patiently, but delightedly, through a program of recitations, dialogs, songs, and like exercises given by the children occupying two full hours. Then came the distributing of the prizes to the winners in the games, and the happy crowd dispersed, feeling more kindly toward each other and realizing more fully the joy of neighborliness because they had come together in their Thanksgiving festival. Similar festivals

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were held at Grace the day before, and at Liberty Union the day after. They were all conceived and carried out by Mr. Huck, the assistant pastor, just from England, thus proving his efficiency and his adaptability.

3. On a snowy Saturday the men of East Joyfield, under the lead of the assistant pastor, arranged "A Community Rabbit Hunt." They met with their guns and went in pairs in different directions, scouring the woods and the fields in search of game. They were measurably successful, and a heap of forty-five "cotton tails" rewarded their efforts. They were distributed among fifteen families, who were to prepare them with other good things for a "Rabbit Social" on the next Tuesday night at the chapel. Though the night was stormy, the chapel was well filled, there was a fine program of music and games, and then a feast of rabbit pie that was appetizing and abundant. So the "cotton tails"

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served the community better by being eaten themselves than they would if they had been left to eat the bark from the young fruit trees on the surrounding farms.

4. Since the pursuit of athletics has so large a place in the minds of the young people in these days, it has been thought worth while to do something in this field. One of the assistant pastors having had some training when in school organized Athletic Clubs among the boys and young men in six or seven different neighborhoods. These clubs met from time to time for practise. They were combined into an Athletic League for the whole parish and occasionally held Field Days. They would come together on the Academy campus at Benzonia and spend the day in sports and games and contests in which a previously prepared schedule of events was carried on. There were junior contests for the boys and the girls too had a part in the last field-day

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sports. Occasionally they have a banquet with toasts and an opportunity for social intercourse. These athletic clubs have not only done much to encourage clean and healthful sports, but they have given the assistant pastor large influence over the young people, and most of them are noticeably regular in their attendance on the services he conducts on the Sabbath.

Ladies' Aid Societies are organized in the various neighborhoods and they bring together in a social way, not only the ladies, but also the men in the winter season, who then find time to enjoy the good dinner that the ladies provide and to spend part of the day in social intercourse. These Aid Societies are ready to take hold in a helpful way of any enterprise that is for the good of the community, and any enterprise to which they devote themselves is bound to go.

5. One more way of working has proved

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to be valuable, and well worth while. Like nearly all small towns, we have a weekly newspaper which finds its way into most of the homes of the parish. The pastor and the editor work together in the effort to make it an organ of helpful power in the community life. For the past three years I have had each week a column—usually a column and a half—in this paper. It is my regular Monday forenoon work to write that column. I put into it whatever I think will be useful to the people, bringing them many a message that would hardly come appropriately into the pulpit, and reaching in that way many whom I would not often come in touch with otherwise. The themes are various, a few may serve as specimens. "How to Keep One's Religion and Make It Pay," "The Back Yard," "The Test of the Summer Time," "The Man You Happen to Meet," "The Utility of the Yell," "The Wedding Bells and Funeral Knells," "Dr.

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Charles M. Sheldon and His Ideas of an Educated Man," "Be a Columbus," "The Keen Zest of Living." Any local topic of general interest is taken up and discussed, and the activities of the church and the social and literary doings in the various out-stations are brought before the people. So they are kept constantly aware that something is going on that is worth while throughout the parish, and I have an opportunity to keep my ideas before the whole parish. This I consider one of my most valuable ways of working, and I find that the Pastor's Column is eagerly looked for and widely read.

This suggests the question whether in the past the pastors of our churches have sufficiently appreciated the value of printer's ink as an adjunct in carrying on religious and community work. If the pastor can speak through the press as well as the pulpit, he is duplicating his influence.

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6. The Benzonia Christian Endeavor Society purchased a stereopticon for use in the Larger Parish. It was equipped with electrical apparatus to be used in the villages, and with acetylene light for the schoolhouses and country places where there was no electric current. It could be easily carried from place to place, and became a very practical and useful instrument in the work. Slides on various subjects were easily obtained, and the effect of lectures and talks was greatly increased. The people in these days want to see things as well as to hear about them, and the sight helps out the hearing. They never get tired of looking at good pictures. It became easy with the help of the lantern to provide an interesting and profitable evening entertainment, and the people showed their appreciation by their presence in large numbers and their careful attention. "The Panama Canal" was thus presented and

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illustrated, and "The Other Wise Man." Some lectures by the pastor—"On Horseback through the Holy Land," "A Week in and about Jerusalem," "Three Months on an Ocean Steamer"—were made more vivid and attractive by views from photographs taken on a foreign trip. In many ways the stereopticon has proved a valuable acquisition, and especially in a country parish can it be used with great profit and satisfaction.

7. In a local option campaign the influence of the Larger Parish made itself felt in an effective way for the banishment of the saloon. Debates were arranged on the question in the neighborhood clubs.

The pastors preached on the subject and made addresses at the meetings held throughout the county. One of the assistant pastors gave valuable service on the Central Committee. In all such movements that have for their object the purify-

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ing of the community and the establishment of righteousness the forces that are active in the Larger Parish are lined up on the right side, ready to coöperate and promptly available for practical work.

An Every Member Canvass for home and foreign missions is carried on throughout the whole parish. Each year a letter is prepared, giving briefly the progress of the work for the year past and setting forth its present condition. These letters are sent by mail to nearly all the families in the parish, with small collection envelopes for the different members of the household, with the request that they bring the offerings to their accustomed places of worship. The children as well as the older people are encouraged to bring in their offerings, and we have found this an effective way of cultivating in them the spirit of benevolence. There is much gain in leading them to feel that they have a part in the work.

VI

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THEIR name is legion. Everything is to be done. Only a beginning has been made. Nothing is finished. What has been accomplished is only a prophecy of the larger and completer work that lies before us in the future. Religious and community work is not mechanical. You cannot finish it up and store it away as the carpenter finishes a box, or the housewife a garment. Life is a development, a growth, and those who deal with life must always be content with beginnings. "Nothing that has life is ever finished." Life in its larger unfolding and its fuller meaning must always be in the future. A life that is finished and complete would better end, and a community that has reached perfection should be translated to another sphere. We must ever be

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content to spend our labor upon beginnings, thankful for such fruitage as may appear from time to time. The real ingathering must always be in the future. What has been accomplished in the Larger Parish gives us confidence in the methods employed, and encourages us to expect larger things from the better and completer application of those and similar methods in the days to come.

It may be well to mention some of the things that have not as yet been fully done, but that we hope to see accomplished in the Larger Parish in the future.

1. The first and most important aim of this work, and of all church work, is to bring people into the kingdom of God. All social and community work must be subordinate to this and lead up to it. The Church must be something more than a social settlement. I still hold to the old-fashioned idea that men need to be saved,

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and that the only salvation that there can be for them is found in loyalty to Jesus Christ. While this salvation is a matter of the spirit, affecting one's standing with God and his relation to the great eternal realities, it also affects his standing with men and his relation to society. And here comes in all the humanitarian and community work that is a legitimate and important part of the church's concern. Community work can never take the place of the work of God's Spirit in the individual life. To be permanently valuable it must be the *result* of that work. The kingdom of God embraces the complete ideal, and if we can induce men to live according to the principles of that kingdom, careful attention will be paid to all the work that needs to be done for the community. Therefore the work of the Larger Parish is primarily, though not exclusively, evangelistic. We are trying to lead men to become Christians,

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not in a narrow sense, but in the large, rich meaning of that word which the teaching of Jesus gives it.

During the three years that we have in review there have been some such results. A goodly number have decided to begin the Christian life and have taken their places in the ranks of the followers of Jesus Christ. We are thankful that the army of the Lord has received so many new recruits. But there are many more who are not as yet willing to enlist. The number of those who are still outside the ranks is greater than of those who are marching under the banner of the visible Church. Much remains to be done in this direction. The work is far from being complete in this its most vital and important aspect. We have only made a beginning. It will not be finished until every person in all the wide parish is openly and positively arrayed on the side of Christ. At the present rate of progress it looks as if

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the Church had work laid out for it for a long time to come. It is not in danger of soon running out of material. There is a great work yet to be done in the way of bringing men into the kingdom of God. We hope to keep that always in view—to make it our central aim and our uppermost thought.

2. There needs to be created in the hearts of the people more respect for the Church, a better understanding of its mission, and a fuller appreciation of its work. Many people have mistaken ideas of the Church, and therefore fail to appreciate its work or its purpose. Some regard it simply as a venerable institution that has long had a place in human society. In former times it has done an important work, and still has its value. It is to be honored for its record and still encouraged in a mild and patronizing way. They would not banish the Church—they are not yet quite ready to

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undertake to conduct human society without it. They tolerate it and perhaps support it in a half-hearted way, but they do not regard it as absolutely essential or its work as vitally important. They do not understand the Church. The Church may be in some measure to blame for this. It has not always understood itself. Its conception of its own mission has been small, narrow, and inadequate, and it was inevitable that no truer or larger impression could be made upon the community. When the Church undertakes to do all for which it is responsible and prosecutes it with the vigor and earnestness that it deserves, the people will begin to understand it better and to appreciate more fully its mission.

Many people regard the Church as an institution to be supported. In common thought this institution, for some reason that may not always appear, has assumed the right to lay the community under tribute

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for support. Some accept this traditional idea without thinking much about it, while others are in revolt against it. One of the assistant pastors was calling at a house for the first time. The master of the house, when he was introduced, said, "Oh, another preacher! Well, I suppose they all have to be supported." And he was not the first representative of the Church that has met with such an indignity.

Here again the Church may be at least partially to blame. It has too often regarded its office as that of preying upon the community as well as praying for it. It has not always been careful to give value received.

It is our purpose to make the Church a necessity in the community. Its good works, its efficiency as an element of power in everything that is for the improvement and uplifting of the people, should be so great and so evident that no one can reason-

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ably call them in question. That is one of the things that needs to be done, and that by the method of the Larger Parish we hope to accomplish. We propose that the Church shall have such a spirit of helpfulness, that it shall be so wise and practical in laying out its work, so energetic and aggressive in prosecuting it, that all shall recognize it as a potent and most blessed force—an institution that they gladly support because of its practical value. Some progress has been made in this direction. The Church has gained immensely in the respect of the people since it began the work of the Larger Parish. The people can see that it is really doing something.

3. There needs to be created a stronger and more universal community spirit. The tendency in the country toward isolation and independence is especially strong. Each farmer is separate from every other. He lives alone, somewhat like a baron in



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his castle in old feudal times, sufficient for himself, without much necessity of borrowing, or thought of lending. Living in such conditions it is quite natural that he should grow selfish, and should come to think largely if not exclusively of his own individual interests. He is in danger of overlooking the fact that society is an organism, and he is a part of it; that he has duties and obligations to the general public; that his life cannot be complete if it is lived alone; that he owes something to the community at large, and that he must get something from it if he would really be a man, do a man's work, and fill a man's place. He must come to see that the public good means private advantage, and that when he cuts himself off from others and thinks only of his own individual interests he is following a foolish and suicidal policy.

This community spirit needs to be care-

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fully cultivated, and that work has been going on in the Larger Parish. The community spirit has been growing. The people are more interested in one another and in those things that are undertaken for the public good than they formerly were. But there is still much to be done in this respect. Not all the people are yet able to look over the narrow boundaries of their own possessions and see their neighbors' needs. Not all grasp the idea of the solidarity of society. But this spirit is growing and there will be larger fruitage in the coming days.

4. There needs to be more team work among the people, more coöperation in carrying out the schemes that are for the public good. When all the people take hold together, there is scarcely anything that needs to be done that cannot be accomplished. A single individual is comparatively powerless, but a common movement in any community is bound to succeed. One

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of the foremost services to any community is to unite its forces and bring the people to work together heartily and enthusiastically in some good cause.

The work of the Larger Parish has been useful in this direction. The Team Work Committees of the neighborhood clubs have this for their object—to lead out in anything in which it is desirable for the people to move together. It is easier to bring the people to unite their efforts now than it was three years ago, but much more remains to be done. The goal has not yet been reached. The effective team work that we have seen is a prophecy of that completer coöperation in all good things that we hope and expect to see in the coming days.

5. In some way more variety should be brought into the lives of country people. Farm life should become one of the most attractive and interesting spheres of activity. Its freedom, its independence, its close

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contact with nature, should give to it for multitudes a compelling charm. It would seem that a strong current of human interest could be made to flow from the crowded and unwholesome conditions of the city to the open country, where the fresh breezes play and the flowers bloom. At present it is not so. The stream flows in the opposite direction and every year the city swallows up much of the best blood of the country. It is the city that attracts, and the country that repels. This can be explained very largely by the isolated and monotonous character of country life.

The only way by which this movement can be checked or reversed is to give more variety to rural life; to break up its monotony and to introduce into it those intellectual and social pleasures and employments that are a necessary part of a healthful and contented life. Young people crave variety, they must get together,

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they must have some kind of amusements, some form of recreation. If they cannot find it on the farm, they will go to the city where it is supplied in lavish abundance but often in objectionable forms.

It has been the object of the work of the Larger Parish to supply this need of country life. It has provided and promoted frequent opportunities for the people to come together in a social way. The Sunday services established in so many places have not only served as opportunities of worship, but also of neighborly intercourse and of the interchange of friendly greetings. The neighborhood clubs have been a kind of social and literary clearing-house for the community, affording many a pleasant and profitable evening and providing something wholesome to think of and to plan for during the day. The Ladies' Aid Societies have brought the women together, in projects and accomplishments of common interest,

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relieving the weeks of monotonous toil with forms of coöperative fellowship. Much more needs to be done to impart interest and attraction to life in the country, and it is something to which the Church, in its desire to minister to the whole man, may very appropriately give its thought and effort.

6. Machinery seems to be a necessity in all kinds of work. Nothing can be done without a method, an organization, a machine—some kind of an instrument to facilitate the process. But the machine is never properly an end in itself. Sometimes it is made an end, but no farmer could be satisfied with a reaper that did not cut the grain, however beautiful and well-made it might be or however smoothly it might run. Nevertheless some churches seem to be satisfied with the smooth running of the machinery, even though the results of it all are very meager.

The primary object of the work of the

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Larger Parish is to help the people and to serve them in a religious and social way, not to promote a denomination, to build up a church, to perfect an organization, or to construct or to operate machinery of any kind. But in order to help the people and serve their best interests efficiently, some machinery, some organization, is necessary. Our thought is to supply it when the necessity comes, but not before. When it is needed it must be invented or discovered, or in some way brought into the service. Certain methods have been introduced. There have been employed some forms of organization, some machinery has been set in operation. Some things we have tried, that did not work satisfactorily and they had to be discarded. Some of the methods that seem to be successful at present may not always continue to work so well, and they will have to be exchanged for others. We must ever keep in view the prime

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object for which we are working—to serve the people and to uplift the community life—and to that object we must adapt our methods and adjust our machinery.

If we do the work that needs to be done in the coming days we shall need a true and unwavering purpose, a clear eye to discern the situation, a calm and correct judgment to fit the method to the work, and above all, the constant leading of the Holy Spirit. The Larger Parish is not a method, or organization, or machine, that one can secure and put in operation and then the work is done. It is a vision—an ideal—that must be a living reality in the soul, and then must be wrought out in actual life in the best way possible.

VII

SOME RESULTANT CONCLUSIONS

THIS story began with "Some Convictions." It ends with "Some Conclusions." There has been an attempt to tell how a vision became a reality. The vision originated in convictions. The conclusions have come from the realization of the vision.

There are a few things that may be stated with confidence as the result of the three years' work in translating the vision into the fact of the Larger Parish. The mention of some of them will round out the story.

1. The village church, if it would do its proper work, must belong to the people and be in close touch with them. It must minister in some way to all the people and be a

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force in the life of all the people. Churches like individuals are known to have certain characteristics, to possess certain temperaments. Some are aristocratic and exclusive. They gather to themselves a number of select families who have common tastes and are congenial with one another. They have good times together, and within that narrow circle there is a delightful social life. Those few people are well trained, and well instructed in the facts and principles of religion as they are understood by them. But they do not seem to get hold of the idea that the church is for all the people; that as Jesus conceived it it is essentially democratic. They have no sense of obligation for the community at large, and make no effort to affect it as a whole and to lift it up to a higher level.

The village church that would do its work must be democratic and must have a community consciousness. It must belong

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to the people—be in close touch with those of each and every class.

2. The village church, if it would do its proper work, must recognize its obligation to minister in some way to the religious and social needs of the people in the outlying country districts. The village should not be its parish, but rather its base of operations, from which it goes forth to all the wide-stretching territory that lies beyond.

3. The church which has this vision, which recognizes this obligation and seeks to discharge it, will find some way of doing it. The work within the towns and villages is often great and difficult. Many churches have failed to reach all the people within the sound of their church-bell, and there is much work at their very doors that they have not yet accomplished. Shall they reach out and extend their parish threefold, and multiply their duties and obligations many times? If they do not do all that

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ought to be done in their smaller parish, shall they increase its boundaries and assume greater obligations? Yes. That is what many churches are languishing for—a bigger job, something that it is worth while to do; something that will challenge all their powers and awaken to enthusiasm their sleeping energies.

4. The only village church that will continue to abide in strength and vigor in the future years will be the church that is all buttressed about by a strong and vigorous country work. It must be done as a means of self-preservation. The village churches are as much in danger of losing their lives as the country churches are. The church that confines its efforts within the village boundaries is sure to languish and dwindle and after a while it will give up the ghost, as it ought to do. As the city is fed from the towns and villages, so the towns and villages are fed from the country. If the

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work goes down in the towns and villages, it will be felt in the city, and if it loses its hold in the country, it will soon lose its grip upon the villages and towns. The country needs the work of the Larger Parish, and it will perish without it. But the village church needs to do the work even more, and unless it takes it up with vigor it is doomed.

5. When the churches come to be more interested in the promotion of the Kingdom than they are in the promotion of their own particular denomination, they will begin to have that prosperity which only those can have who are really doing the Lord's work. The chief hindrance to the work of the churches is often the churches themselves. One of the greatest needs of the villages and rural regions is fewer churches.

If in each small village there was a single church in which all the Christians of the community could unite, they could easily

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organize the work in all the surrounding country and carry it on successfully. But where there are a number of churches they are in the way of each other and effectually prevent any widespread and efficient work. Still, even in that unfortunate condition, something may be done in a systematic way to help the rural regions. Why cannot the representatives of the various churches get together, make a united survey of the country for miles in every direction, become fully acquainted with the situation and conditions, and seeing clearly what needs to be done, divide the territory up between them, giving each church its own particular field, and allowing it to arrange for its cultivation in its own way? I believe that some such arrangement is feasible when it is the Kingdom that the churches are chiefly interested to promote, instead of the particular denomination to which they happen to belong.

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6. When all the religious forces in any community can combine and work together, all the work that needs to be done in the community can be done, and there will be no lack of resources to carry it on with vigor and success. In almost every community there are Christians enough, and there is money enough, for the work, if only they can be assembled and utilized. But when they are scattered about, lying around loose and uncombined, or when they are organized into competing camps, they are useless for any purpose of aggressive and effective work. It isn't the poverty of the people that stands in the way, or the small number of professing Christians. It is the lack of team work, the lack of coöperation, that constitutes the weakness of the cause. No work can be done in the country that is at all effective without this coöperation and combination. With it, all the work that needs to be done, can be done.

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7. The church that sees the vision and with faith and courage undertakes to make it a reality, will be prospered. Perhaps the experience of the Benzonia church may be cited as proof of this. Situated in a small village, composed of people of meager means, in a country that has not even yet emerged from pioneer conditions, it had for many years carried on its work only with much sacrifice and careful economy. Three years ago, by a unanimous vote, it formally adopted the policy of reaching out and annexing all the territory within a radius of five miles in every direction, thus greatly increasing its obligations and more than doubling its annual budget of expenses. There was some questioning as to how it could be done, but, without waiting for clearer light, it moved forward unanimously to the enlarged work.

What do we find to be the result of the three years? They have been the three

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most prosperous years of the church's history. Two men have been added to the clerical force. The expenses of the church have been met, and the bills have been paid when they were due. The contributions for home and foreign missions have more than doubled. More members have been received than during any other similar period. There has been perfect harmony and the people have been glad and happy in their common work. Ten places of worship have been established in the country around where regular services are held. The people in these neighborhoods attend their own services and do not come into the village church as some of them formerly did. The present arrangement does not tend to build up a large central congregation, but has the opposite effect. Thirty former central members have become part of a newly formed church three miles away. There has been no great increase in the population,

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either of the village or of the country around. But the congregations and the Sunday-schools were never so large as they have been during this period. It has been found impossible to accommodate all those who wished to worship with the church, or properly to care for those attending the Sunday-school. A larger building became an actual necessity, and in the summer of 1913 an addition was made, increasing the seating capacity of the building by one third, and providing a number of rooms for Sunday-school and social purpose. Can we doubt that the blessing of God will attend any church that sees the vision, and with faith and courage and sacrifice gives itself to the work of making it a reality?

8. When all the ministers and all the churches catch the vision of the Larger Parish and address themselves to the work of making it a reality, the rural regions will be rehabilitated, religiously, morally, and

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socially, and a splendid impulse will be given to the work throughout the whole country. If some practical plan can be adopted by the village churches for extension work, the whole aspect of the country situation may be quickly changed. The people, both in the villages and in the open country, are more ready for some such movement than has been supposed. Would not the Larger Parish idea as set forth in this story furnish a good working plan for such a movement?

No man can have very much enthusiasm in a task that does not challenge all his powers and bring them into action—neither can a church. With the village churches it is a case of self-preservation as well as out-reaching service. They must do this work or die. They will not long survive the spiritual declension of the country. The country and the village stand or fall together. Their fortunes are united. They must help

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each other up into a better life or they will sink into a like economic, social, and spiritual stagnation and death. The plan of the wider parish, or some better plan, if it is wisely and vigorously worked, will secure both to the village and the country communities their rightful heritage of spiritual and social strength and usefulness.

9. Nearly all the Christian denominations have their home missionary boards or societies whose functions it is to help sustain gospel work in needy places and to organize and cherish churches on the frontier and in destitute places. The frontier lines are not so extensive as they once were, but the desolate places are almost as numerous as ever, and they are in the very heart of our most highly developed civilization. In fact, they lie all about our churches, often almost within the sound of the church-bell. It is often too expensive to sustain a minister and maintain regular services in all these places

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and so they are left without gospel privileges. If they can be grouped about a village church as a center, and if the church can be the base of operations from which the work is carried on in all these outlying regions; if through the aid of the home missionary boards a sufficient clerical force can be maintained to carry on the wide work, will not such a course be a practical, a successful, and an economical method of accomplishing home mission work?

God is waiting to give the vision to those who are ready to receive it. The country in its great need and desolation is waiting for the help which the village churches can give to them. I believe the home missionary societies and boards are ready to coöperate in some such plan for the uplifting and the evangelization of the country districts. The village churches themselves are waiting for the wider work to quicken their waning life, and to kindle their dying en-

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thusiasm. The world is waiting to see them move forward in a determined and consecrated effort to reduce the vision to reality. God is waiting to pour out his Spirit in abundant blessing upon the churches that have enough faith and courage to undertake the work.

I believe that the fulfilment of all this is not far in the future, and if this story of the Larger Parish shall contribute even in a small degree to this result, the teller will be amply repaid for his attempt to picture the new path along which God has led him.

“Move to the fore.

God himself waits, and must wait, till thou
come,

Men are God’s prophets though ages lie
dumb.

Halts the Christ-Kingdom, with conquest
so near?

Thou art the cause, then, thou man at the
rear.

Move to the fore.”

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